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The 21st Navajo Nation Council

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Council amends Navajo Nation Code to officially acknowledge Navajo Veterans, Ethics Law Amendments Act of 2010 fails to get 59 votes

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – On day two of its 2010 Fall Session, the 21st Navajo Nation Council unanimously passed legislation officially recognizing Navajo Veterans in the Navajo Nation Code. The Council also voted on the Ethics Law Amendments Act of 2010, which failed to get the 59 votes needed for passage.

Honorable Young Jeff Tom, vice chair for the Human Services Committee, sponsored legislation to include the definition for “veteran” in Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code in an effort to respect and appreciate the sacrifice of Navajo servicemen and women of the U.S. Armed Forces.

“Navajo Veterans were never acknowledged by the Navajo Nation Code, despite their significant roles in Navajo and American History until today,” Tom said. “Navajo Veterans honorably discharged from one of the U.S. Armed Forces should be proud that their own Navajo Nation laws officially recognize them.”

The amendment to Title 2 of the Navajo Nation Code also authorizes the Navajo Department of Veteran’s Affairs to develop and implement veterans programs according to the newly adopted “veterans” definition: “A Navajo veteran is an individual who is an enrolled member of the Navajo Nation and has been discharged under honorable conditions from the United States military service with a DD-214, Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty.”

Honorable Larry Anderson, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corp., praised Young Jeff Tom for sponsoring the legislation and the Council for passing the measure.

“We have been working on this law for the past year and we are ecstatic that the Council passed this piece of legislation today,” said Anderson, a member of the Human Services Committee. “We are overjoyed for our Navajo Veterans and the definition of a veteran in the Navajo sense, so to speak.”

Mr. Anderson added that the passage of the law by the 88-member Council is historical and said, “We will be waiting for President Joe Shirley’s signature to sign this legislation into law.”

In other action, the Council voted 32-29 on the Ethics Law Amendments Act of 2010, which failed to get 59 votes for passage. The act would have prevented former public officials or public employees, including attorneys and tribal court advocates from suing the Navajo Nation for a period of ten years.

“Findings from the last two to three years indicate that attorneys, legal advocates and those barred with the Navajo Nation Bar Association and the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah have earned retirement benefits from the Navajo Nation or found greener pastures at other law firms, are representing either an outside party or parties that filed a lawsuit against the Navajo Nation government,” said Redhouse. “As a result of leaving the Navajo Nation, they come back and cause not only confusion but difficulties in the operation of the Navajo Nation government. For that reason I have sponsored this resolution.”

Critics, however, said the ten year window would create problems such as preventing Navajo Nation public officials and employees from starting business partnerships with the Navajo government should those former public officials or employees decide to go into the private sector to help the Navajo people.

"As a member of the Economic Development Committee, I always encourage business development for our people," said Honorable Katherine Benally, who opposed the resolution. "If you look at a tribal employee, specifically those who go into business after their termination, what are we doing to them with this law? If passed, we would be tying back their hands, preventing them from helping our people in other ways. If they have retired and are earning an income of some sort then their loyalty should be left with the Navajo Nation."

Critics such as Honorable LoRenzo C. Bates also said Redhouse's proposal falls short because the law would not be enforced.

Day three of the 2010 Fall Session will resume tomorrow with more legislative action items. For more information regarding the adopted agenda and pieces of proposed legislation, please visit www.navajonationcouncil.org.

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